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PAGE C-20

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A Year of Korea Inquiries Leaves Much More to Do

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 2—After more than a year of investigations into the Korean scandal by the Department of Justice and the House ethics committee, there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

The investigators have produced reams of credible evidence, despite denials from Seoul, that the South Korean Government conceived and financed a six-year covert plan to influence American Congressmen, officials, journalists, academicians and businessmen.

The investigators have identified Korean officials and agents, from President Park Chung Hee through secret political operatives to unwitting couriers, who took part in the operation to influence United States policy toward Seoul. Its aims and methods are known, although details of specific ventures need to be clarified.

But the Justice Department and the ethics committee have made little progress apparent to the public toward their real objective, which is to discover and punish those Congressmen, if any, who took bribes or committed other illegal or unethical acts.

Divided Responsibility

That responsibility is rather neatly split. The Justice Department is responsible for finding and taking to trial those accused of breaking the law. The ethics committee is charged with identifying representatives who have broken the rules of the House or violated standards of official conduct.

So far, the Justice Department has obtained only one Congressional indictment, against former Representative Richard T. Hanna, Democrat of California, who has been accused of conspiracy, bribery and illegally acting as a foreign agent.

Two other indictments, on similar charges, have been brought against Tong-sun Park, the South Korean businessman, and Hancho C. Kim, a Korean-born American citizen. Mr. Hanna and Mr. Kim are scheduled to go on trial this month, and Mr. Park has agreed to return to this country from South Korea to testify at trials involving allegations of influence-buying here.

After long negotiations, the Justice Department announced Friday that the South Korean Government had agreed to permit United States officials to interview Mr. Park this month in Seoul and that, if he later testified in this country truthfully at bribery and conspiracy trials, he would be given full immunity from prosecution for any past criminal acts.

Investigators' Goal Questioned

The indictments against him and Mr. Kim, and the information developed in hearings before the ethics committee and another House investigative unit, have left the impression that the South Korean Government is on trial here for trying to subvert Americans.

The investigators deny that. Leon Jaworski, the special counsel to the ethics committee, has repeatedly asserted that the committee is interested in errant Congressmen, not in Koreans. And the investigations have named dozens of Congressmen somehow involved with the Koreans. Even so, the public focus has been blurred.

The information on Congressmen given to the investigators by Korean defectors, by associates of the three indicted men and by scores of witnesses interviewed has all been kept secret or deleted from public testimony.

Until the agreement between Washington and Seoul was announced, both the Justice Department and the House ethics committee had charged that they were being held up by the uncooperative attitude of the South Korean Government.

Two Formal Agreements

Under the pact, which was reached as a series of "understandings," a formal agreement is to be signed in Seoul before Mr. Park is questioned there. A second, formal agreement is to be signed to confirm Mr. Park's commitment to truthful testimony and the Justice Department's promise of immunity.

The present "understandings" stipulate that Mr. Park will "assume no obligation to appear before Congressional committees" and that he would be admitted to this country for the "specific purpose of and limited periods necessary for testifying at court trials."

A day after the "understandings" were announced, John J. Flynt, Democrat of Georgia, who is chairman of the ethics committee, denounced the arrangements as "a facade." Mr. Jaworski said that South Korea "continues to conceal facts from Congress and has in addition persuaded the Department of Justice to assist it."

Still another obstacle has been the reluctance of the United States intelligence community to permit investigators to make public certain reports that are said to contain hard evidence of Congressional misconduct.

Avoiding Premature Disclosure

Attorneys for the Justice Department say that its investigation has proceeded at a sluggish pace because of the need to avoid jeopardizing the case by premature disclosure. The ethics committee, formally known as the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, is subject to a House rule requiring that a member be permitted to refute defamatory evidence before it is made public.

Its investigation has also been slowed by splits within the panel. Some senior members of the committee appear to have been unwilling to press ahead. It is hard, several have said, to sit in judgment of their colleagues.

Mr. Jaworski, who has been given nearly a free hand in running the committee investigation, is said to be aware of the dangers in the apparent lack of progress. But he is also said to be willing to take the criticism, trusting that the public would eventually see that the committee has conducted a thorough and impartial inquiry.

The special counsel is further said to be aware that the real problem is not in finding Congressional miscreants, since a list of those would be evidence in itself that the committee had done its job.

Rather, the credibility of Congress as an institution capable of policing itself would be jeopardized if the committee tries to exonerate accused Congressmen but is unable to present persuasive evidence of innocence.

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